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SUBJECT: INITIATIVES TO COUNTER TORTURE IN THAILAND

REF: STATE 070129

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In the wake of Thailand's accession to the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) in October 2007, the RTG has launched a number of initiatives to improve awareness of and implementation of UNCAT. Most focus domestically is on the situation in the Deep South, which is afflicted by an ethno-nationalist separatist insurgency. The U.S. supports several programs to strengthen the rule of law with an eye towards the situation in the Deep South, indirectly touching on UNCAT through education and outreach. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In the wake of Thailand's accession to the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) in October 2007, the Rights and Liberties Protection Department (RLPD) within the Ministry of Justice has been tasked with administering Thailand's anti-torture campaign. The RLPD organized four regional seminars in mid-2009 to educate government personnel and NGO civil rights activists about UNCAT. In addition to these outreach efforts, the RLPD is revising the Thai-language translation of UNCAT for greater accuracy. Finally, they plan to organize a conference for relevant RTG agencies to clarify their respective roles in the development of anti-torture laws and initiatives and to determine the status and progress of these efforts.

¶3. (U) The RLPD is also in the process of creating an exploratory committee charged with implementing an Anti-Torture Law in Thailand. It will be chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, who is currently considering a proposed list of committee members.

¶4. (U) Thailand's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) also has a subcommittee on the anti-torture campaign. Although the NHRC is currently in a transitional period between commissioners, it conducted a seminar in January for civil rights lawyers working in the Deep South. The seminar focused on UNCAT, and NHRC sought feedback from the participants on how to improve the implementation of UNCAT in Thailand. A former judge chairs this subcommittee within the NHRC.

¶5. (U) Meanwhile, both international and local NGOs actively engage the Thai legal community on these issues. For example, the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) launched a three-year campaign in Thailand supporting the implementation of UNCAT. While their long-term plan calls for capacity building for the defense bar and the judiciary, they have also published two significant torture prevention

manuals that were subsequently translated into Thai. In May they conducted a three-day workshop in Bangkok focusing on the role of lawyers in preventing torture, with a particular emphasis on lawyers practicing in the Deep South. Their partners in this project were the International Commission of Jurists, the Bangkok Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Swiss Embassy in Bangkok, and the Cross Cultural Foundation (a local organization).

¶6. (U) Finally, local NGOs, such as the Muslim Attorney Center, continue to draw attention to alleged incidences of torture in the Deep South by tracking individual cases and maintaining and disseminating detailed records of the names of victims, locations of detention, and circumstances of abuse.

¶7. (SBU) As the above examples indicate, the main thrust of Thailand's anti-torture campaign, both governmental and non-governmental, is directed at outreach, education, and legal community training. While not specific to anti-torture initiatives, the USG currently supports an American Bar Association program in the Deep South -- through DRL's Muslim World grant program -- that bolsters the work of human rights lawyers in the Deep South and touches on UNCAT (specifically public education and outreach). Furthermore, USAID will soon launch a project in the Deep South that will focus on strengthening independent agencies and civil society, as well as support peace-building efforts. Both these programs provide a context within which the U.S. could buttress Thailand's current anti-torture campaign.

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